Ivy Tech Librarians Go the Distance in Online Course Development

by Susan Clark

Distance is a term with which individuals associated with Ivy Tech Community College are quite familiar. The College's 24 campuses (and numerous "off-campus" locations) dot the Hoosier landscape from one end of the state to the other. A car trip on an Indiana stretch of interstate an hour in any direction would almost certainly guarantee encountering at least one green exit sign (a close approximation of Ivy Tech green, by the way) pointing the way to an Ivy Tech campus.

Even so, being here, there, and everywhere does not make it a given that all Ivy Tech students pursue a degree or certificate in a building of glass and stone with the College logo prominently displayed at the entrance. Jobs, family, the price of gasoline, and countless other facts of life have led more Ivy Tech students than ever to consider the option of earning credits through online courses. Since the core mission of Ivy Tech Community College is to "prepare Indiana residents to learn, live, and work," the College takes very seriously the call to serve the needs of its students by making available a broad selection of courses as individuals make thoughtful decisions regarding the synchronization of their educational needs with their lifestyles and personal commitments. And along with providing an extensive number of online courses from which to choose, College faculty and staff expend enormous amounts of time and effort ensuring that the content and quality of these distance courses are equitable to that of its face-to-face classroom experiences. It is a process that has developed and improved over time.

In 2006, as the number of Ivy Tech online courses began to rapidly grow, Ivy Tech librarians around the state began actively serving on statewide online course development committees made up primarily of program chairs from each of the 14 Ivy Tech regions. These committees were given the charge of developing content, activities and assessment techniques for a single version of specific online courses offered statewide in order to guarantee continuity and optimal learning experiences. Librarians were brought in to act as resources themselves—and who better to understand the vast amount of information, services and resource

tools that the College makes available to its students and faculty?

When the librarians began serving on the online course development committees, they did so by participating in face-to-face meetings—first a development session, generally for the better part of a day, and then a review of the course after the first year. As a general rule of thumb, librarians from Ivy Tech campuses around the state volunteered to work with specific courses, often based on their own personal areas of interest and expertise. Each curriculum committee worked a bit differently, but, for the most part, it became the librarian's job to listen closely to the discussion of those individuals determining the course content and then offer suggestions with regard to the Ivy Tech Virtual Library and the services and resources that might best fit the course being discussed. In addition, having a librarian in place at the committee meetings allowed for 'show and tell' opportunities and 'mini-instruction' sessions (e.g. How to Add a Persistent Link to Your Course—It's Easier Than You Think!). After the development meeting, librarians were given access to the online course and added the resource links and specific information regarding library services and tools agreed upon during the initial meeting, seeking additional committee input as needed.

Over the last three years, the course offerings have increased by leaps and bounds and so has the need for librarians to serve on the statewide committees. While professional library positions have also increased in number at Ivy Tech, that growth spurt has not quite kept pace with the online course figures, understandably requiring the College's librarians to take on more and more courses and making it increasingly difficult to meet the need. Recognizing the situation, the statewide Ivy Tech Library Directors' Committee recently decided to revise the structure of librarian participation in online course development by cultivating the knowledge base of the College librarians gained through working with particular courses. Now librarians are recruited for entire programs rather than selected courses; accordingly, instead of a librarian working with the English 111 course only, he or she works with

all of the online development committees involved in the English curriculum.

While at first glance it appears Ivy Tech librarians are still dealing with an imbalance on the scales of justice, the library directors have determined that basic library information and many program-specific library resources are applicable for multiple courses throughout a program. The librarian responsible for a given program is familiar with the individual course objectives and is well-qualified to make suggestions to the development committee regarding appropriate, interesting, and useful library-related links and selections. One excellent statewide find for Ivy Tech libraries in recent years has been LibGuides (http://www.springshare. com/libguides/index.htm). The librarians have decided that creating a LibGuide for each program with online course offerings will substantially cut the duplication of time and effort and will allow the librarian assigned to a program to target the specific needs of courses and address overall program resource efforts within the pages of one guide.

Ivy Tech librarians are pleased to have such an excellent opportunity to directly impact student success in working with the curriculum committees to develop distance courses that include outstanding library resources and service offerings. It is particularly gratifying to realize that many of these students may never walk into one of the College's physical libraries, yet they will still have ample occasions to work with library resources and become acquainted with some of the College's library staff members.

Ivy Tech librarians are also pleased to have a less direct—though no less important—impact through an opportunity to 'teach the teachers.' It is the policy of Ivy Tech Community College that online instructors themselves work though a course that will certify them to teach online. Several times a year this—surprise, surprise—online course, *Certification for Online Teaching*, is available to instructors throughout the state.

Within this course is a library module which details library services and contact information and provides opportunities for instructors to interact with the Virtual Library. Librarians designed the module, and a librarian is assigned the job of updating the information, assignments and quizzes within the module as time passes and databases and services change. Instructors must achieve a passing score in this module (as well as the other modules) to successfully complete the course. Both gratifying and encouraging to Ivy Tech librarians are the instructors who contact their campus librarians after attaining their certification to ask for additional assistance or advice in adding library resources and assignments to their courses. Now for the librarian updating the module, it can be a bit like playing the ever-popular *Frogger* video game in which the frog tries to successfully navigate traffic to get from one side of the street to the other. Trying to jump in and make updates at just the perfect moment in time when the course is not currently being taught somewhere in the state is a challenge, to say the least. But when all is said and done, having this opportunity to promote the Ivy Tech libraries and their excellent resources and services to College faculty who will utilize what they have learned in their classrooms and make students the ultimate beneficiaries is well worth any dodging and dashing.

Distance and Ivy Tech? Yes, Ivy Tech librarians, students and faculty are quite familiar with the term. But whether in actual miles or cyberspace, distance is simply moving from point A to point B, and Ivy Tech librarians contribute to making that move possible every day, 24 hours a day.

About the Author

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Susan Clark received her MLS from Indiana University. Her professional experience includes work with the Anderson Public Library (1992-1996) as a reference librarian and as the library director for the Pendleton Community Library (1996-1999). In 1999, Ms. Clark became the library director of Ivy Tech Community College's East Central campus libraries where she continues to work today.

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